



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS  
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

**VOLUME ONE**

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With an essay by Richard Rand  
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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

*Nineteenth-Century European Paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute* is published with the assistance of the Getty Foundation and support from the National Endowment for the Arts.



The Getty Foundation



Produced by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute  
225 South Street, Williamstown, Massachusetts 01267  
[www.clarkart.edu](http://www.clarkart.edu)

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Production by The Production Department,  
Whately, Massachusetts  
Printed on 135 gsm Gardapat Kiara  
Color separations and printing by Trifolio, Verona

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Distributed by Yale University Press, New Haven and London  
P. O. Box 209040, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-9040  
[www.yalebooks.com/art](http://www.yalebooks.com/art)

Printed and bound in Italy  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

Nineteenth-century European paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute / edited by Sarah Lees ; with an essay by Richard Rand and technical reports by Sandra L. Webber ; with contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen, Kathryn Calley Galitz, Alexis Goodin, Marc Gotlieb, John House, Simon Kelly, Richard Kendall, Kathleen M. Morris, Leslie Hill Paisley, Kelly Pask, Elizabeth A. Pergam, Kathryn A. Price, Mark A. Roglán, James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, Fronia E. Wissman.

volumes cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-935998-09-9 (clark hardcover : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-0-300-17965-1 (yale hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Painting, European—19th century—Catalogs. 2. Painting—Massachusetts—Williamstown—Catalogs. 3. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute—Catalogs. I. Lees, Sarah, editor of compilation. II. Rand, Richard. III. Webber, Sandra L. IV. Title. V. Title: 19th-century European paintings at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

ND457.S74 2012

759.9409'0340747441—dc23

2012030510

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32 | Rue Saint-Romain, Rouen 1895

Oil on panel, 46 x 37.2 cm

Lower left: E. Boudin 95; lower right: Rouen / 27 7bre

[Romain?]

1955.540

*Rue Saint-Romain, Rouen* is an unusual picture for Boudin. A street scene with people milling about is a motif used in one of the other Clark Boudin paintings, *Villefranche* (cat. 30), painted around 1892, but in few of his other works. Compared to his paintings of the sea, beaches, and sky, *Rue Saint-Romain, Rouen* feels almost claustrophobic. Rather than an open sky with his characteristic clouds or a beach scene with groups of people set against an open vista of water, this picture concentrates on the architecture and street activity of the old, medieval section of Rouen. Boudin only painted in Rouen during one year, 1895, a year in which he also traveled to Venice, spending two months working there. The specificity with which Boudin inscribed this work places him in Rouen on “27 7bre” or 27 September 1895. Other scenes of Rouen include a dozen images of the River Seine, perhaps a more typical Boudin water subject, but only one—the present work—of an interior street. All the others show the city from afar, with an open expanse of water, the many cathedral spires a focus of the backdrop. Street scenes were not completely absent from Boudin’s work, as the other Clark picture attests. He also painted several versions of the cathedral of Abbeville the year before, similarly with people and dogs populating the street.

Perhaps Boudin turned inward, as it were, because he was drawn to the historic character of the rue Saint-Romain. After all, this street, which runs between the rue de la République and the west front of Rouen cathedral, is replete with buildings from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Indeed, the city originated in this area in which the streets remain narrow and cobblestoned, with over 700 half-timber houses, some of which are prominent features in Boudin’s scene.

Many artists were drawn to Rouen, perhaps most famously Claude Monet. In the Clark collection are his painting of *Rouen Cathedral, the Façade in Sunlight* (cat. 229) and a drawing of a distant view of Rouen (a copy after his 1872 painting, presently unlocated).<sup>1</sup> Camille Pissarro also worked in the city, and his lithograph of the rue Saint-Romain (fig. 32.1), done one



Fig. 32.1. Camille Pissarro (French 1830–1903), *Rue Saint-Romain, Rouen*, 1896. Lithograph on paper, 38 x 27 cm. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts (1968.18)

year later in 1896, shows the same view as Boudin’s. Both depict the street looking south. The tall structure on the right is the Tour Jeanne d’Arc, all that remains of the castle built by Philip Augustus in the early thirteenth century and in which Joan of Arc was tried and awaited sentencing. The building to the immediate right of the tower is the residence of the archbishop, or the Palais Archiépisopal. Boudin’s scene breathes life into the old part of the city. Unlike Boudin’s bustling depiction, Pissarro’s is quieter, despite a few figures that make an appearance. Boudin even acknowledged the city’s many churches by including a nun dressed in her habit at right. Her black garment contrasts sharply with the painting’s otherwise gray, monochromatic palette. It is as though the gray skies from Boudin’s seascapes have translated themselves into a cityscape. With only a few splashes of local color, the painting has a tonality similar to that of Pissarro’s black-and-white lithograph, although it also features thick, loosely applied brushstrokes, including figures composed of disconnected strokes that appear more complete only at a distance.

Present-day photographs of the rue Saint-Romain from this angle demonstrate the actual placement of the buildings on this street. They show that Boudin painted the archbishop’s residence at the right much taller than it was, perhaps to give the tower a balanced element in the foreground of the picture. Boudin’s perspective also gets a bit jumbled due to the crowd





of people. Rather than giving a detailed architectural view, Boudin captures the impression of busy French street life. KAP

**PROVENANCE** James Reid Wilson, Montreal (d. 1914); probably Stevens Art Gallery, Montreal;<sup>2</sup> [Knoedler, New York, sold to Clark, 21 Apr. 1945]; Robert Sterling Clark (1945–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1956a, no. 84, pl. 1; Williams-town 1990b, no cat.; Rouen 2010, pp. 320–21, no. 91, ill.

**REFERENCES** Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 2, ill.; Schmit 1973, vol. 3, p. 325, no. 3468, ill., as *Rouen. La Rue Saint-Romain*.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** This small panel, 0.6 cm thick, judged to be poplar wood during a 1982 examination, has the grain running vertically. There is a slight concave warp along the left side of the picture and a dent in the lower right corner. An old check near the top edge was stabilized with adhesive in 1982. The panel has narrow chamfers along the back edges, which remain despite the panel being thinned in preparation for cradling. The varnished mahogany cradle, which fits within the chamfers, has four fixed members with beaded edges and five sliding bars which are all still movable. When the painting was tested for the 1982 cleaning, solvent sensitivity was noted on many dark colors. Patchy ultraviolet light fluorescence reveals the partial cleaning done at that time. There are scattered small retouches and some frame abrasion along the upper edge.

The off-white ground was applied in one or two layers. The underdrawing, which may be charcoal, is not particularly discernible, being visible only along the spire or turret at the end of the street. A greenish wash, visible in low magnification in many passages, may have been used to lay in the various forms. The paint is a combination of thick opaque strokes and scumbles, only some of which are wet-into-wet, indicating that perhaps more than one sitting was used to complete the picture. The painting was signed after the paint had set. Slight paint adjustments can be seen in the turret and rooflines at the end of the street, and in two figures in the crowd whose head positions were lowered by applying gray paint over sections of their red and green hats.

1. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.1914.
2. A letter in the curatorial file from F.D. Chapman, Esq., Montreal, states that the works in Wilson's collection were divided among the four heirs of his estate. A label on the back of the painting indicates that the picture was at one time with Stevens Art Gallery, owned by Frank Stevens and located on Drummond Street in Montreal. It is unclear whether Wilson purchased the painting from Stevens or it ended up at the gallery after Wilson's death.

## William-Adolphe Bouguereau

French, 1825–1905

### 33 | *Nymphs and Satyr* 1873

Oil on canvas, 260.4 x 182.9 cm  
Lower left: W-BOVGVEREAV-1873  
1955.658

“Really I know of no picture of a big composition which is finer in America.” “And what a beautiful picture for drawing paint & composition!!!!” “One likes it better each time one sees it.” “The ideal of female loveliness in the nude & admirably composed—Line marvellous—Bouguereau at his best was a superlative artist!!!!”<sup>1</sup> These few remarks regarding William Bouguereau's large painting *Nymphs and Satyr*, culled from Robert Sterling Clark's voluminous diaries, attest to the collector's keenness of eye and independence of vision. His criteria for buying a work of art were few: good craftsmanship, above all; good value for his money; and Francine's approval. That the subject matter and scale of *Nymphs and Satyr* departed from the small, intimate landscapes, still lifes, and genre scenes that formed the bulk of his collection did not constitute for him an anomaly. It was a good painting, it was available, and so he bought it.

At 2.6 meters tall and 1.8 meters wide, *Nymphs and Satyr* is the largest painting in the Clark's collection and depicts four nymphs—water-loving creatures—attempting to drag a satyr—a creature of the forest—into a woodland pool. The recent thinning of the varnish layers (see Technical Report) allows the viewer to see the painting as the artist intended. Most significantly, light is now a major component of the picture. Sunlight falls through foliage on a shoulder here, an arm there. These highlights combine to create a luminous arabesque that encircles the faces in the middle of the composition. Bouguereau's masterly skill in depicting flesh is displayed to the full here. Palpably conveyed are the force in the nymph's fingers behind the satyr's head, the pressure of another nymph's thumb on his arm. His hands, too, merit scrutiny: the right one, if not reaching for at least extending toward the breast of the foremost nymph, as much as the left one, gilded by light. Details previously obscured by the varnish are now better seen. Three nymphs at the far right are twinned by their reflections in the water, and the pelt over the satyr's